



# CITY OF LAUREL OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

8103 Sandy Spring Road, Laurel, MD 20707  
Phone: 301-725-5300 ext. 2125 • Fax: 301-725-6831

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**Keith R. Sydnor**  
Mayor

February 10, 2026

Economic Matters Committee  
230 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: HB239- Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026

Dear Delegate Valderrama and Honorable Committee Members:

The concept of local planning and zoning authority is foundational to a nation and a state that believes in government of, by, and for the people. It is one of the primary mechanisms through which communities shape the physical character of their streets, neighborhoods, and overall quality of life. When the State of Maryland delegated zoning authority to local jurisdictions, it entered into an implicit compact with its residents: so long as local governments operate within the bounds of state law, communities would retain the right to regulate land use in ways that protect property enjoyment, neighborhood stability, and the wealth created through thoughtful, deliberate planning.

House Bill 239 / Senate Bill 36 dissolves that compact. While framed as a response to Maryland's housing crisis, the bill represents a significant intrusion into local zoning authority and, more critically, an erosion of the property value Laurel's residents have built and safeguarded through decades of intentional land-use regulation.

The City of Laurel fully acknowledges the housing affordability challenges facing Maryland and the nation. As a municipality within the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area, Laurel has experienced rapidly rising housing costs driven by regional market pressures, while also being largely built out within its existing boundaries. Action is necessary. However, that action should focus on future development, not retroactively disrupt established neighborhoods that were built under a clear, predictable, and legally adopted zoning framework.

We recognize that some degree of state preemption may occur during this legislative session. As a reasonable and balanced compromise, the City of Laurel respectfully requests that zoning in place as of December 31, 2025, be locked in. This approach would allow municipalities and residents to continue relying on the expectations that guided their investments and planning decisions, while still enabling the State to shape future growth—particularly in high-demand regions such as the Washington, D.C. Metro Area.

### **Section 4-104(3)(iv) (Page 9, line 8): Setback Preemption**

This provision, which preempts local setback regulations, poses significant risks. Existing setbacks are tied not only to neighborhood character but also to utility easements, topography, and stormwater management requirements—factors that vary widely by location across the Washington metropolitan region. Eliminating these locally tailored standards jeopardizes rights-of-way and undermines effective stormwater control, potentially creating costly and unintended infrastructure consequences. Applying this provision solely to future development would allow municipalities, utilities, and engineers to adapt responsibly.

### **Section 4-104(4) (Page 9, line 14): Townhouse Definition and Placement**

This section alters long-standing definitions of “townhouse” and overrides locally determined zoning placement. Laurel has established thirteen distinct dwelling types and ten residential zoning classifications through its Master Plan, Planning Commission deliberations, and Mayor & City Council actions. These decisions were made intentionally to balance density, livability, and infrastructure capacity within a dense metropolitan context. Forcing townhouses onto existing single-family-zoned streets risks overcrowding, loss of green space, and unhealthy living conditions—the very outcomes urban planning is designed to prevent. Allowing local governments to plan for townhouses prospectively, rather than imposing them retroactively, strikes a more responsible balance.

### **Section 4-104(5) (Page 9, line 19): Lot Size and Subdivision**

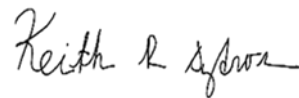
This provision presents perhaps the most serious threat to neighborhood and financial stability. When combined with the prohibition against minimum lot sizes greater than 5,000 square feet, it permits significant subdivision of existing improved properties. In a high-demand region such as the Washington, D.C. Metro Area, this provision incentivizes speculative activity that could destabilize established neighborhoods for short-term financial gain. Limiting these changes to future development would protect current homeowners while allowing municipalities to plan transparently for new growth.

The City of Laurel is not resistant to change, nor indifferent to housing needs. We have enacted modern, balanced zoning policies, including:

- Mandatory affordable units in rental developments
- An inclusionary housing ordinance requiring 8% affordable units in new for-sale developments, secured by 30-year affordability covenants
- Mixed-use zoning near transit and major corridors to promote smart growth consistent with regional transportation and employment patterns

We are actively addressing housing challenges within the framework the State has provided—thoughtfully, responsibly, and in partnership with our residents.

The City of Laurel supports meaningful action to address housing affordability; however, such action must be responsible, balanced, and grounded in respect for existing communities. We respectfully urge the General Assembly to adopt reforms that enable future development without retroactively undermining neighborhood stability, local infrastructure planning, or the property values residents have worked decades to build—particularly in mature, high-density jurisdictions within the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area. Maryland can and must meet its housing goals, but it should do so in a manner that preserves the principles of local governance, protects community trust, and honors the good-faith investments made under long-standing zoning frameworks.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Keith R. Sydnor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K' and a long, sweeping underline.

Keith R. Sydnor  
Mayor